

VZCZCXYZ0002
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNJ #0467/01 0890841
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 300841Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3418
INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1007
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0303
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0671
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0547
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 0346
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0087
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0744
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1244
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2525
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1631
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 1004
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0636

UNCLAS NDJAMENA 000467

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, INR, DRL, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA;
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICAWATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CD](#)

SUBJECT: CHAD: CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS ON POLITICAL WARPAT

REF: NDJAMENA 296

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The approach of the May 3 election has prompted civil society leaders publicly to ask the international community to pressure the regime to postpone the election. Some have privately lumped the United States with France in supporting the regime. The operative thesis is that a Deby fraudulently granted another term in power is the greatest threat to Chad's precarious stability. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Chadian civil society leaders, grouped together in the Follow-Up Committee of the Appeal for Peace and Reconciliation, gave a press conference March 29, condemning in the strongest language the holding of the May 3 presidential election under present conditions. The Committee was formed in November 2004 by a coalition of civil society groups, seeking to convene a national forum to effect a peaceful transition of power based on thorough electoral reform. The Committee appealed to the international community to put maximum pressure on the Deby regime to suspend the election in favor of the national forum.

¶3. (SBU) A subtheme of the press conference, which emerged in questions and answers after the prepared statement, was the Committee's disavowal of a proposal from the Delegate Minister for Human Rights, Abderaman Djasnabaille, for the convening of a National Forum on Human Rights in Chad. (Djasnabaille formally requested international assistance for this idea February 3, and resident donors agreed among themselves, reftel, that the proposal did not have either the requisite clarity in its objectives or support of civil society to merit financial backing.) The Committee condemned Djasnabaille's proposal as a cynical tactic by the government to divert attention from civil society's call for the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

¶4. (SBU) In the lead-up to the press conference, poloff called on several of the civil society leaders for their assessment of the political temperature of the country and, specifically, their assessment of opposition's call for obstruction of the election. Delphine Kemneloum Djiraibe (former head of the Chadian Association for Promotion of

Human Rights and one of the most passionate proponents of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation) told poloff March 23 that it had been clear for a number of years that the only way out of Chad's deepening malaise was a new national conference, one much more focused than the conference of 1993 that had produced the present constitution. She said that when the leaders from every segment of Chad's civil society had come together in November 2004, they were painfully aware of the electoral calendar and the need to act then, when there was time. Unfortunately, President Deby had never given them an audience, despite repeated appeals to him. Members of the Committee had traveled in France and the United States, had been warmly and sympathetically received in some quarters of those countries, but the Committee's appeals to the international community for pressure on Deby had likewise gone for naught. The election of May 3 would meet a complete boycott from the democratic opposition and would enshrine Deby as president presumably for life. For its part, the Committee was not calling for boycott or obstruction -- such was the role of political parties not civil society -- but the Committee took the strong view that the election should under no circumstances take place. In the Committee's view, the election was an incitement to violence, and there would be violence, potentially on a large scale -- all of which could be avoided with enough pressure from the international community on Deby.

15. (SBU) Poloff followed up March 27 with a call on Dobian Assingar, former head of the Chadian Human Rights League and another energetic proponent of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. Dobian took a more acerbic line, both on the elections and on the role of the international community, than Delphine. He described himself as a man of peace, someone who had stood up all his life for peaceful solutions, but the May 3 election was totally unacceptable and the time had come for the Chadian populace to oppose this charade forcefully. There was no doubt that many innocent Chadians would suffer ("there is no omelette without breaking eggs"). But, he insisted, the violence and suffering would be less now than if Deby were elected and continued to drag the country further down. Meanwhile, he said, the Chadian people felt betrayed and abandoned by the international community.

16. (SBU) Finally, poloff on March 28 called on Tenebaye Massalbaye, present head of the Chadian Human Rights League. Massalbaye verged on being hostile in his language and was expressly critical of the United States, beside himself with anger and frustration. He said he was tired of diplomats coming to his office, full of lofty words of support for human rights, democracy, and good governance. Every Chadian down to the humblest farmer or nomad knew that France was Deby's backer and that the United States was the only hope for a change, but the United States had done nothing to put pressure on France or Deby, except for the one laudable statement by the American Ambassador at the Independence Day reception last July. Chadian civil society had shown remarkable unity in pushing for this national forum, but to succeed, Chadian civil society had to have support from the international community. None had been forthcoming, and the result was the May 3 fraud, an indictment of the democratic process which the United States claimed to support. The populace was fed up and the likelihood was a bloodbath. The normally peaceful democratic opposition had no choice but to call for active obstruction of the election. Make no mistake, the populace was opposed to Deby across the board, whether North or South, Muslim or Christian. The regime had for too long depended on passivity of Southerners and Northern fear of losing political control to the South, but now everyone in all sections of the country knew that the tiny ruling clique had robbed with equal greed from every section, leaving everyone, Northerner as well as Southerner, with nothing.

17. (SBU) Comment: The dominant hostility, across the board, is toward France, but we do come in for some strokes of the brush, as there is a widespread belief that we could wave a wand and transform Chad, if we wanted to. These civil

society leaders are understandably feeling raw, confronted as they are with the stark fact of the complete failure of their effort to promote national dialogue. Their predictions of violent doom are probably exaggerated, as the capacity for this long-suffering populace just to keep suffering is considerable.

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